

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### Return of the American chestnut

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

When you work with endangered species, you sometimes reflect on those that may disappear in your life, or the pristine places that have become spoiled. However, our generation is poised to bear witness to the near opposite – the revival and return of what was once one of our most important species here in the Eastern United States.

American chestnuts were once the most dominant tree in eastern forests, their chestnuts a hugely important source of food for forest animals, their wood commercially prized, and can still occasionally be found in old mountain buildings. The inadvertent arrival of the chestnut blight, a fungal disease from Asia, essentially wiped the American chestnut from our forests.

For years, scientists have worked to cross American chestnuts with blight-resistant Chinese chestnuts, to produce a tree as American as possible, and resistant to the fungus. Now that work is transitioning out of the lab, out of the nursery, and into the forest.

To date, the American Chestnut Foundation has produced 25,000 to 30,000 one- to two-year-old, sixth-generation seed and seedlings that should be blight resistant. These seedlings have been planted by the group's members, partners and the U.S Forest Service. While work continues on breeding resistance, now those that have been planted face the test of whether or not they'll withstand the blight.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.